Community Services Industry Strategy Workforce Plan Update (August 2017)

Dear Colleagues

We write to provide an update on progress in developing the first Action Plan to implement the *ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026*.

Thanks again to all who attended the Industry Strategy Implementation Action Planning Workshop in June 2017, which focused on development of a Workforce Plan. 65 people participated with energy, insight and goodwill in this half-day of discussions. Others who were unable to attend have asked to be kept informed on progress, so this communication provides an overview of the Workshop, as well as giving an update on subsequent work.

The Industry Strategy (http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/community-sector-reform/industry-strategy-2016-2026) is overseen by the Joint Community Government Reference Group (JCGRG). The JCGRG agreed in early 2017 to implement the Strategy through a series of three-year Action Plans, the first of which is on Workforce Capability. The JCGRG has also established a Steering Group to monitor, and provide ongoing advice to JCGRG on implementation of the Industry Strategy. Information about the Steering Group's role and membership is attached.

The Workshop was convened by the Steering Group so that stakeholders could develop practical suggestions for Action Plan priorities that could be considered by JCGRG. The Workshop was opened by Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, whose involvement was testimony to the importance of this work. Representatives from the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS), which co-chair the JCGRG, briefed participants on the background to the Workshop and on existing governance and funding arrangements that can support implementation of the Industry Strategy. The briefings emphasised that the Action Plan should leverage and build on current and past investments in developing the ACT's Community Services workforce.

Workshop pre-reading gave details about existing funding for professional development in community services, but discussions at the Workshop revealed that stakeholders have varying levels of familiarity with that background. The following overview provides a summary of the pre-reading material.

A range of supports for developing the ACT's Community Services workforce have been made over many years by the ACT and Commonwealth governments, working in consultation with industry stakeholders. ACT directorates provide some supports as part of ongoing program management arrangements. For example, resources are allocated to staff of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFSP) funded agencies to participate in professional development programs, and scholarships are provided for early childhood educators, to achieve qualifications mandated by the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector's National Quality Framework. The ACT Government also provides funding to peak bodies to provide training and other workforce development programs, for people working in many different roles in the industry – ranging from front-line workers, to developing leaders, to people with substantial governance roles, such as Chief Executives and volunteer Directors on NGO Boards.

Some resourcing is provided under the ACT's Community Sector Reform Program, which also involves 'red tape' reduction and other procurement and regulatory initiatives aimed at helping the community sector respond to the many changes it is facing. Some of those initiatives are supported by funds from the Co-Contribution Levy. A summary of red tape reduction initiatives is available on

the CSD website: http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1071106/CSD-Information-Sheet_Charities-and-Community-Sector-Red-Tape-Reform.pdf.

Both the ACT and Commonwealth governments contribute funding for Vocational Education and Training in the ACT, which is managed by Skills Canberra, targeting training at predicted ACT industry skills needs. In recent years, the Commonwealth has also made substantial contributions through the Sector Development Fund that supports implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. New ways to support ACT workforce development continue to be devised; for example, 'Skilled Capital' was recently introduced to help Canberrans access quality training and employment in industry areas of skills needs.

Most of the time in the Workshop was devoted to **Roundtable discussions of practical possibilities and priorities for the Action Plan**. There were seven Roundtable topics, decided collaboratively by the Workshop based on participants' common interests. The topics were:

- Vocational Education and Training for the Community Services Industry;
- Volunteering in the Community Services Industry;
- Requirements for Workers (including Volunteers) with Lived Experience;
- Common Capabilities required across the Community Services Industry;
- Access Pathways to Support Entry to the Community Services Industry (including for Volunteers);
- Encouraging Diversity in the Community Services Industry; and
- Retention in the Community Services Industry.

Roundtable groups offered an impressive range of suggestions about practical measures that could be included in the Action Plan. Notes from Roundtables were transcribed to enable analysis and consideration by the Steering Group. Initial discussions at the Workshop welcomed some **recurring themes in suggestions from Roundtables**, including the importance of:

- Mapping – and then addressing – Industry/sector-wide capability requirements, at all levels (from frontline staff, up to governance Boards), for paid and unpaid workers (volunteers), at all stages of careers (from entry levels, through ongoing development, including of specialist capabilities, to top-level leadership roles), and for both 'generic' capabilities required across community services, and for specialist/priority workers, such as people with lived experience, and workers from Indigenous and other diverse cultural backgrounds;
- Supporting formal (accredited) training with on-the-job supports (placements, supervision, etc.);
- Having all future workforce capability projects build on – not duplicate – what has already been established (e.g. CYFSP-funded training, NDIS sector development projects) and complement other initiatives to support community services reforms across the industry (e.g. 'red tape' reduction, improvements to procurement processes) and within individual organisations;
- Drawing on the remaining funds (about $640,000) from the Co-Contribution Levy to support implementation of the Industry Strategy only where other funding sources are not available; and
- Working well with the VET sector, to ensure that learning and development to support the Industry Strategy reflects contemporary good practice in the community services industry, and the values and 'real world' capabilities that are now required, such as person-centred service delivery.

The Workshop recognised, and agreed, that next steps in developing the Workforce Capability Action Plan should be driven by the Industry Strategy Steering Group, reporting to JCGRG. The aim is to have a draft Action Plan ready for consideration by the JCGRG at its August meeting.

Since the Workshop, ACTCOSS and CSD have drafted advice to the JCGRG to consider at its August meeting on the shape and priorities of the Workforce Capability Action Plan. For example, the Plan could be framed by reference to the actions planned over a three-year period in relation to key workforce parameters, such as supply, career development, retention and progression to leadership/governance roles. Agreed principles for the Action Plan include building in evaluation from the outset, and ensuring that projects to be funded through the Industry Strategy can be decided and commissioned quickly, so that practical benefits are delivered to community services organisations, staff and clients as soon as practicable.

Next steps will involve ACTCOSS work with the JCGRG Industry Strategy Steering Group to analyse priorities from among the many ideas from Roundtables. The Steering Group is comprised of representatives from consumers, unions, community organisations and the ACT Government. People interested in joining the JCGRG Industry Strategy Steering Group should put in an expression of interest to director@actcoss.org.au.

The JCGRG will consider a draft Workforce Plan prior to it going to Minister Stephen Smith for her approval. Possible projects will need to be scoped and costed to assess their viability and options for financing the work. The intention is to use existing funding mechanisms wherever possible, and to seek approval from the Minister to draw on remaining Co-Contribution Levy funds for actions that cannot be funded from other sources. Once the Workforce Plan is agreed by the minister, there will be an opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to prioritising what actions and projects go ahead.

In response to feedback at the June 2017 Workshop, CSD is establishing dedicated email contacts to streamline communications about JCGRG's work and the Industry Strategy. In the meantime, suggestions or questions can be sent to the Industry Strategy Steering Group's Secretariat officer, catherine.cook@act.org.au or on **6205-5301**, or to actcoss@actcoss.org.au .

CSD will continue to update its website content relating to the Industry Strategy, and to make available further documents on-line, including the Workforce Capability Action Plan once it is finalised.

On behalf of the JCGRG, we look forward to your continuing engagement with our shared work to sustain and strengthen the capabilities and performance of the ACT Community Services Industry.

Bernadette Mitcherson
Deputy Director General
Community Services Directorate

Susan Helyar
Director
ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS)